

Welcome to Chapter 4 in our Pandemic Flu series

Workforce issues will present a concern for home health agencies in the event of a pandemic flu epidemic. This will strain the existing nursing and home health aide shortage and high turnover rates.

Each agency will need to examine their workers ability to report to work in the event of a pandemic flu epidemic. Employee illness, transportation issues and child care will cause scheduling challenges.

In a proposed guidance in June 2008, HHS recommends that health care workers who have direct contact exposures receive pre-exposure prophylactic antivirals. HHS feels prophylaxis will reduce absenteeism due to illness.

- All staff should be screened for illness before contact with patients
- Availability of transportation should be assessed
- The number of employees with school age and day care age children should be assessed
- The number of employees that are employed by other health care facilities should be assessed

The willingness of workers to report to work during this time must be considered. Surveys indicate that a significant number of workers would not be willing to work during this time. To increase the number of willing workers:

- Voice the importance of each person's role
- Provide correct protective equipment
- Provide proper training
- Identify informal child care arrangements
- Provide psychological support

Workforce training will be an issue and the scope of practice and worker's liability should be considered.

- Staff will need training on the specific outbreak
- Clinical skill training should be updated as patients may be discharged earlier than normal with higher acuities
- Home health aides may need to be trained in dispensing medications under emergency situations
- Workers may need training on handling an increase number of deaths
- Review and revise policies and procedures for emergencies: leave policies, transportation, business operation

Resources

Training of Pandemic Flu

www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/training/

Guidance on Preparing the Workforce for an Influenza Pandemic

http://www.osha.gov/Publications/Influenza_pandemic.html

Guide to Managing Stress for Crisis Response Workers

<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/disasterrelief/publications/allpubs/SMA-4113/introduction.asp>